

## Tips for Working with a Resident Who Hoards:

- Early identification and intervention are helpful—educate staff and the community about hoarding
- Partner with code enforcement agencies and mental health providers
- Develop clear, mutually agreed upon goals and specific timeframes for accomplishing expectations
- Schedule semi-annual or annual inspections to monitor concerns about possible hoarding problems
- Ask open-ended questions, mirror the language used by the resident, and listen carefully
- Be respectful and non-judgmental
- Try to understand why the accumulated items are so important
- Helping the tenant means “working with the resident” instead of “doing the work for the resident”
- Help resident set limits and self-monitor his or her hoarding
- Agree to post-compliance inspections
- Treat residents the way you would want to be treated

## What Doesn't Work?

Ignoring the issue | Blaming & shaming |  
Avoiding the discussion | Removing clutter | Unsupported cleanups |  
Working in isolation | Lack of follow-up monitoring

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## Information & Resources for Housing Providers



## Whose Residents Might Be Hoarders

***Hoarding** is receiving increased attention due to shows such as “Hoarders” and “Hoarding: Buried Alive.” Although information about this condition is still in its infancy, this brochure is designed to share tips to assist housing providers dealing with hoarder residents who may meet the definition of “disability” under the Fair Housing Law.*

### VIRGINIA FAIR HOUSING OFFICE



## FACTS ABOUT HOARDING

1. **Hoarding** is the excessive accumulation of items along with the inability to discard them even if they appear useless.
2. **Hoarding** and **squalor** are not the same. Squalor is defined as filthiness or degradation from neglect.
3. **Animal hoarding** involves accumulation of multiple animals. It is problematic because of fecal and urine smells, sickly or diseased animals, and lack of control by the pet owner/resident. (Concerns about animal hoarding should be directed to the SPCA.)
4. Studies show that **2-5%** of the population—



15 million adults—is comprised of hoarders.

5. **Hoarding** is a mental disability. A **vast majority (92%) of hoarders** also suffer from one or more *other* mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and social phobia.
6. **Hoarders** are unable to use their kitchens and bathrooms as intended.
7. **Hoarding** creates health and safety concerns that may lead to lease violations: fire hazards; blocked entry/exit; trip and fall risks; infestations; non-working plumbing; and unsafe structural or sanitation systems.

## HOARDING & FAIR HOUSING LAW

For fair housing purposes, disability means: *“with respect to a person, (i) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of such person’s major life activities; (ii) a record of having such an impairment, or (iii) being regarded as having such an impairment.”*

**Hoarding** is a **mental impairment** that, in most cases, limits a person’s ability to conduct one or more major life activities—for example, caring for one’s self.

*Hoarding becomes a legitimate concern to housing providers when it affects the health and safety of the hoarder, other residents, staff, and the property.*

## HOARDING CHARACTERISTICS

- Clutter/disorganization including what appears to be random piles or paths.
- Indecisiveness about discarding items, for fear of making the “wrong” decision or not being able to see their things.
- Hoarders are very private and may not acknowledge they have a problem.
- Hoarders are intelligent and include people from all backgrounds and walks of life, including teachers, engineers, rocket scientists, and business owners.
- Hoarders are most often elderly women.
- Hoarders are frequently obese.
- Hoarders are not messy, lazy or defiant.

## REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

**Residents who are hoarders** have the right to request a reasonable accommodation from the housing provider—even though they may not always ask for an accommodation.

If the housing provider knows (or should have known) the resident is a hoarder, the law requires attempts to reasonably accommodate the disability before evicting the resident.

At the same time, minimum health and safety standards must be met, even if the resident who hoards requests or is offered a reasonable accommodation.



**The reasonable accommodation** request will sometimes be for an *extension of time*, to bring the unit up to housing codes before lease termination or eviction proceedings begin.

**A plan of action** included in the reasonable accommodation offer is a useful tool for helping hold the resident who is hoarding accountable—and for documenting the housing provider’s efforts to accommodate the request.